



August 20, 2007

TO: Pat Farrell, Provost  
Mo Noonan Bischof, Co-Chair, University Assessment Council

FROM: Gary Sandefur, Dean  
Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean and Director, L&S Academic Planning, Program  
Review and Assessment

RE: Annual Report on Academic Assessment Activities, 2006-2007

As noted in our last report, in 2005-2006, the College of Letters and Science worked extensively with our departments and programs to update plans for assessing student learning in all academic degree programs offered across the college. In addition to providing an update on continued progress on that front, this report includes updates on implementation of changes made as a result of the assessment of the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements, changes to academic programs approved at the college level, the results of a small WebSurvey@UW research project undertaken, a discussion of co-curricular learning outcomes, and presentation of a series of promising conversations and initiatives intended to promote more intentional student learning with respect to liberal education.

### **1. The L&S Assessment Plan**

The 2003 L&S Assessment Plan (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/assess/AssessmentPlan.htm>) remains in force. This report serves as our mechanism for documenting and reporting, at a college level, L&S efforts to understand and improve student learning. It is reviewed by the L&S Academic Planning Council and the Dean's Senior Staff. We will post this document on the L&S Assessment website, and it will be shared with the Curriculum Committee and other groups across the college.

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## 2. College-wide Assessment Efforts

### A. *The L&S Assessment Plan Update Project, 2006-2007*

*(L&S Office of Academic Planning, Program Review, and Assessment of Student Learning)*

Attached to this document is a summary report of the status of assessment plans and reports regarding degree programs offered within the College of Letters and Science (Attachment A). Please note that document serves also to answer the request for detailed information regarding assessment activity in L&S programs and departments (requested as **Content Item 3** in your June 25, 2007 request for this report). The materials summarized to create the attached report can be accessed online at the website dedicated to Academic Assessment in L&S, [www.ls.wisc.edu/assess](http://www.ls.wisc.edu/assess). (At this time, the plans and reports are within an access-restricted area; please use “lsassess” as the login ID and “evalu8” as the password.)

We have reviewed all plans and reports submitted and have proposed a cycle for periodic reporting on future assessment activities. Where feasible, we have linked this cycle to other regular activities, such as accreditation or program review. The proposed reporting scheme is pending approval by the L&S Academic Planning Council, which has oversight responsibilities in this area.

We are pleased, overall, with these reports: they are simple and achievable, and should serve departments well as internal tools to gauge program performance. In the great majority of cases, learning outcomes are discussed in terms of *what students actively will know or be able to do* upon completion of the program; there are relatively few instances where essential outcomes are described in terms of the programs’ aspirations about what will be provided or made available to students. In addition, departments that employ traditional projects and milestones for graduate education are discovering ways to more systematically use those artifacts of student learning as program-level evidence of how graduate programs function. And, we are pleased to note that several departments extend the focus of their attention beyond what they do for their own majors. In particular, the Departments of Chemistry and Physics clearly identify their roles in advancing student learning for other degree programs, as well as for helping non-science majors understand scientific questions and methods. The Department of the History of Science describes its responsibility with regard to helping non-science majors understand scientific subjects and methods, and for helping science majors understand questions and methods related to research in the humanities. Such bridges are essential to liberal education, and we are pleased to see our departments consciously build them.

It continues to be the case that assessment of student learning thrives best in those situations where the information is meaningful and is used. When changes to existing courses and curricula are proposed, when programs are reviewed, and when new programs are developed, assessment information plays a key role in answering the questions “why do this?” and “what impact will this have on student learning?” We continue to develop sensible contexts in which these questions may be asked and usefully answered, as may be seen by the sections that follow.

*B. Implementation of Revisions to the L&S Baccalaureate Degree Requirements  
(L&S Curriculum Committee)*

Revisions to the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements went into effect on May 21, 2007. These revisions were the product of an extensive undertaking to assess and improve baccalaureate education in L&S. This project used a range of assessment tools (which included peer benchmarking, an alumni survey, and focus groups), considerable discussion and consultation about the results, and a series of recommendations that were approved by the L&S Senate in April 2005. During the revision process, the committee again endorsed the value of liberal arts and science education, and found that, for the most part, the curriculum developed thirty-five years earlier seemed fundamentally capable of achieving the goals of liberal education. Unfortunately, that curriculum had become “encrusted” with a number of confusing rules and strategies for achieving other purposes; important changes had also occurred in areas affecting the curriculum (e.g., increases in interdisciplinary studies, the enactment of university-wide General Education requirements, increased emphasis on articulating learning outcomes). The revisions approved address these issues, and clarify and streamline the requirements. (For more information about the rationale behind the revisions, please see the archive section of [http://www.ls.wisc.edu/curriculum/.](http://www.ls.wisc.edu/curriculum/))

In 2006-2007, the L&S Curriculum Committee, under the leadership of Professor John Coleman (Political Science) continued the detailed and extensive discussions begun the previous year about how best to ensure that implementation of the changes would proceed smoothly:

- A specially convened committee consisting of members of the Curriculum Committee (L&S CC) and L&S Student Academic Affairs (L&S SAA) conducted an extensive analysis of the impact of the changes on existing policies and practices, to address potentially negative issues *before* they occur. These efforts were greatly informed by discussions led by Assistant Dean Anthony E. Garcia, who invited the SAA assistant deans most conversant with policies (and student requests for exceptions to them) to consider the implications of each change to the curriculum.
- Once these potential questions were addressed, Assistant Dean Tori Richardson led the effort to revise the *Undergraduate Catalog* materials to improve communication with students about the current requirements. One of these tools provides a one-page summary of the requirements (Attachment B), articulated in terms of the learning goals served by the requirements. The discussion of student learning contains an improved discussion of liberal education learning goals (<http://www.wisc.edu/pubs/ug/10lettsci/ugstudy.html>), the better to help students understand what they should acquire in any degree program completed in L&S.
- L&S SAA and L&S CC representatives led workshops and presentations attended by advisors across the college and university to discuss the changes. These presentations ranged from discussions about how the assessment of student learning was used to inform the process of making changes to detailed discussion of how the changes might affect individual students. Throughout, these discussions emphasized that the changes reinforce the principles of an education in the liberal arts and sciences, and that all advisors are encouraged to communicate these principles to our students. Groups who participated in these presentations included the L&S Advisors Consortium, the School of Education Programs

Committee, the School of Business Office of Undergraduate Advising, Registrar's Office staff, and others.

- L&S SAA took the lead on reprogramming the degree audit formulas to reflect changes in requirements. Assistant Dean Michael J. Pflieger used this opportunity to improve the format of the degree audit report not only to reflect the changes in requirements, but also to streamline and organize the report to be a more effective tool for communicating with students. The new report presents the requirements (and student progress) within an overall educational scheme that promotes acquisition of tools for learning and communication, and which reflects the college's value for both *breadth* and *depth* of study.
- The Registrar's Office contributed to this process throughout, from working with L&S Administration to implement changes to course designations, to identifying the appropriate implementation date, to developing an easy way for continuing students to use a "what if" feature (at the degree level) to find out whether it would be to their advantage if they were to "opt in" to the new degree requirements. The last of these endeavors proved to be extraordinarily difficult, labor-intensive, and time consuming; we are deeply appreciative of the efforts to which our colleagues went to serve the many L&S students who will benefit from this feature.

At the time of this writing, we have heard few reports of issues still to be addressed. We are hopeful that, as issues arise, we will be able to address them.

### C. Changes to Academic Programs (L&S Curriculum Committee)

As noted in previous reports, the L&S Curriculum Committee *Guidelines for Curricular Change* (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/chapter1-3ccpol.htm>) require discussion of assessment of student learning in requests to approve changes in academic programs. Brief notes on changes approved for various programs are listed below:

- *Art History*. Technical revisions to the language requirement, to align it with L&S degree requirements regarding language.
- *Botany*. Program revised to improve alignment with L&S degree requirements, to streamline the program, and to help students complete the requirements more efficiently within a wider array of courses available to them.
- *Bachelor of Social Work*. Social Work requested changes in requirements for admission to the accredited undergraduate program. Assessment data had revealed that second option available in the two-pronged admission strategy (which called for submission of a portfolio, cover letter, and reflective essay, rather than a simple GPA cutoff) was more effective in admitting students best prepared to succeed in the program. A further change eliminated a required course in response to changes in the National Council for Social Work Education requirements for accreditation.
- *Classics*. Two program-level changes were sought. First, to introduce a survey course requirement at the graduate level; second, to alter the structure of the Certificate in Classical Humanities. The latter changes will make it easier for students in other programs to pursue a broad but coherent course of study in Classics, without having also to study ancient languages.

- *Communicative Disorders*. The department “modernized” its curriculum and aligned requirements with those recommended by the American Speech-language Hearing Association accreditation requirements.
- *French*. Technical correction related to revisions approved in 2005-2006.
- *Hebrew and Semitic Studies (Biblical Track)*. Responding to assessment results, the department revised requirements to the Biblical Studies track of the undergraduate program; these changes are likely to make this studies track more attractive and more achievable to students who may not intend to undertake graduate work.
- *Music*. Technical correction to delete a requirement that impeded students’ ability to complete a track in the undergraduate program.
- *Second Language Acquisition (PhD)*. Responding to feedback from students and participating faculty, the committee overseeing this program sought revisions to the list of courses required for completion of the program.
- *Scandinavian Studies (PhD)*. Responding to feedback from students and faculty members who had been approached to oversee special committee doctoral degrees in Folklore, this program sought permission to establish a department-managed track in that area.
- *Statistics*. Addition of a new course to the list of courses that meet requirements in the undergraduate program.
- *Theatre and Drama*. Changes to core studies requirements in the undergraduate program, to refine changes to the requirements that were approved last year. These changes also bring the department into compliance with the L&S requirement that departments may require a maximum of 40 credits to be taken in the department.

In addition, the Committee approved 206 requests to add, change or delete courses in the L&S course array. It is important to note that results of efforts to assess student learning are often expressed at the course, rather than program, level. Explanations for requests to change courses frequently cite efforts to modernize curricula, respond to student feedback, align courses with student learning outcomes, and similar endeavors to promote student learning.

#### *D. L&S and WebSurvey@UW Project*

L&S granted to several L&S departments and programs a small amount of funding to support the development of online surveys in support of academic, program-level assessment. Grant recipients were required to consult with UWSC and with Dr. Klein to obtain advice about whatever aspects of survey design presented challenges to them (e.g., question development, sampling strategies, data analysis). This required consultation served several purposes:

- to help ensure that surveys produced useful results
- to provide departments with “the basics” regarding good quality survey research
- to inform L&S and the UWSC about department survey needs as they relate to surveys conducted for department/program-level assessment
- to help L&S and UWSC ascertain whether common questions asked by units engaged in surveys conducted for this purpose could be standardized and made available to all UW programs via the *WebSurvey@UW* online survey tool.

Eight programs participated in this endeavor, producing a variety of survey tools, several of which could be adapted to programs beyond those that developed them. Dr. Klein is currently compiling those instruments and working to develop a format to facilitate sharing them more widely.

#### *E. Other Activities Related to the Assessment of Student Learning*

*University General Education.* As noted in the report submitted by the UGEC, that committee will be engaged in discussion related to the definition of learning outcomes for “general breadth”, that is, student learning in the Arts and Humanities, and in the Social and Natural Sciences. Given its role in reviewing and approving course level designations for breadth, L&S will be participating actively in these discussions, which will make possible the assessment of student learning both in the general education as well as in the L&S curriculum.

*L&S Student Academic Affairs Co-curricular Learning Outcomes.* In 2006-2007, the Student Academic Affairs Assessment Team developed a set of learning outcomes that could be applied division-wide to SAA. These learning outcomes are intended to serve as a unifying force for the division, since the broadly stated themes can be applied to each unit in the context of the unit’s particular work with students. Each unit has been asked to develop a distinct set of objectives which flow from a learning objective in the SAA master document, to be used to assess the work they do and, most importantly, to promote student learning in co-curricular contexts essential to students’ holistic academic experience (advising, career services, academic enrichment, deans’ interventions). The report and learning objectives submitted by SAA Assessment Director Sara Hinkel appears here as Attachment C.

*Liberal Education and America’s Promise – An Exciting Convergence.* “Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College” is a ten-year initiative sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities that champions the value of a liberal education to students and to the nation. (For more information, please consult the AAC&U website, <http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/index.cfm>.) This project’s goal is to encourage a better public understanding of “what really matters” in college—that is, that a flexible and broad education helps students succeed, solve problems, participate in civic discourse, and have a positive impact on the world around them. The discussion of these benefits are best summarized by a set of explicitly stated learning outcomes (see p. 22 of [http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/documents/GlobalCentury\\_final.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/documents/GlobalCentury_final.pdf)).

The LEAP project began in 2005, and the State of Wisconsin is one of the pilot sites for the program. L&S plays an important role in UW-Madison’s contribution to this effort, and Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson and Professor Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor (German) serve as UW-Madison’s representatives to the UW System Advisory Group on the Liberal Arts. As the LEAP initiative has developed, several other groups in L&S and across campus worked to better explain to students the value of an educational experience that couples critical thinking and communication skills with a breadth of understanding across a variety of modes of inquiry. These units include various units and programs that have explicitly identified student learning outcomes (e.g., SAA, SOAR, the First-Year Experience, L&S/SoHE Career Services, UGEC), and others that seek to identify more clearly what constitutes a broader “UW-Madison

Experience”. L&S staff have participated in and helped to support these conversations as they have begun to coalesce, and with the University General Education Committee and the AAC&U, contributed to a campus-wide advising conference held on March 15, 2007. The purpose of the conference was to help advisors discuss the benefits of liberal education with their students.

The Director of Academic Planning and Analysis and Co-Chair of the University Assessment council conducted a careful survey of general learning outcomes articulated by units and programs across campus. They have proposed that the LEAP outcomes could serve UW-Madison as a succinct expression of shared values that find their unique expression in each unit and program. We concur. We anticipate that L&S will continue to participate in these discussions, and look forward to the outcome.

*Improving Learning by Improving Teaching.* Almost 70% of the UW-Madison's Teaching Assistants teach within the College of Letters and Science, where they play an essential role in undergraduate education. Letters and Science TAs provide an important link between faculty and undergraduates through their diverse roles in undergraduate education. Since 1990, L&S has worked closely with its Teaching Assistants to provide professional development opportunities, foremost among which is a comprehensive day of training workshops led by past recipients of L&S teaching awards. In 2007, Dr. Brian Bubbenzer (Director, L&S Teaching Assistant Resource Center), facilitated an intensive listening session to understand how well the training sessions were working, and to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement in TA training. Several suggestions have been made, ranging from inclusion of sessions focused on International TA issues and strengthening the program's relationship with the English as a Second Language program, to helping departments develop and administer assessment tools that provide feedback on instruction during the semester to allow mid-term corrections. Please see Attachment D for more information.

*Participation in Accreditation and Certification Processes Outside of L&S.* In September, 2006, L&S representatives participated in a meeting convened as part of the ABET review of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering; the purpose of this meeting was to validate the role of L&S as trustee for the University General Education Program, as well as to discuss the connections between L&S and Engineering. In April 2007, L&S representatives participated in several meetings convened regarding the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction recertification of the UW-Madison School of Education. These discussions centered around the university's efforts to ensure that our students master skills, concepts, and content related to general education as well as content areas in which secondary education teachers obtain certification – areas in which L&S participates extensively.

We commend our colleagues on the successful outcome of those conversations, and look forward to our continued partnership in meeting the university's commitments to its students.

*Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Activities.* Assistant Dean Elaine M. Klein continues to maintain a professional relationship with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, UW-Madison's regional accrediting agency. Serving not only as a member of the consultant evaluator corps, Dr. Klein also facilitates discussions on the assessment of student learning as an HLC Assessment Mentor and instructor in the Assessment

Academy, and is frequently sought out by other institutions as an expert consultant on matters related to assessment and HLC accreditation.

### 3. Assessment Activity in Academic Programs and Departments

As noted above, Attachment A serves as our summary of the assessment activities in which our degree-offering departments and programs are currently engaged. In addition to these activities, we note the following:

- In 2005-2006, the Department of Mathematics was asked to respond to a provostial request to conduct a special assessment of a particular course (Math 112). The department has submitted a report of that project to you under separate cover.
- The Writing Across the Curriculum Program provides informational resources, training, and support for instructors who teach Communication B and Writing Intensive Courses (see <http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~WAC/>). As part of this effort, this campus-wide program includes useful information about assessing student learning – both at the course and program level – in the materials it provides instructors. We see this further evidence of the extent to which activities that are explicitly focused on learning and student achievement of outcomes have taken hold on our campus.

### 4. Assessment Activities Planned for 2007-2008

- The L&S Academic Planning Council will be formally vested with the responsibility to oversee assessment in the College.
- The APC's Guidelines for Academic Program Review will be revised to elicit more detailed discussions of student learning in academic programs.
- As we encourage departments to engage in meaningful assessment of student learning, we will continue to find sensible uses for assessment results, including periodic reports to the dean, as a component of department/program review, as the foundation for requests for revisions to existing academic programs, as the rationale requests to develop new programs, etc.
- We will continue to develop low-cost mechanisms to support departmental efforts related to improving student learning (maintaining website, talking with departments, etc.).
- L&S will continue to participate in campus-level assessment activities (Assessment Council, LEAP, UGEC).
- L&S will continue to support Dr. Klein's interactions with the Higher Learning Commission Assessment Mentor Network and Assessment Academy, with an eye toward better understanding of the national conversation that increasingly seeks to encourage institutions of higher education to be "learner-focused".

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